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One Belt One Road: Chinese Power Meets the World

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However, several other themes emerge in two or more chapters that get no mention in Taylor's bookend sections.

- Marshall won more than he lost, but he did lose often, when he did not have the stronger argument. Universal military training and military unification are two perfect examples.
- A significant element in Marshall's approach to strategy was his effort to find initiatives that were economically sustainable. He knew there were limits to power, even U.S. financial power, and he wanted to find mechanisms that could be sustained over the long term.
- The logic of military power is the logic of military power. Marshall did not turn a blind eye to new technology—he saw the great potential and value in air-power, for instance—but new weapon systems, even nuclear weapons, were just tools; they did not invalidate strategic plans and concepts. Put another way, the more things changed, the more Marshall stayed the same.
- Marshall was not beholden to the institutional interests of the U.S. Army. Even though he had spent most of his adult life wearing brown and khaki uniforms, he often prioritized the contributions of the air and sea services over those of the Army. He never let bureaucratic concerns direct national-security policy or strategy.
- Marshall always took a core-and-periphery approach to geopolitics and strategy. Europe was the main theater in both World War II and the Cold War. Even though he had spent part of his career in China as an early version of a foreign area officer, going so far as to learn Chinese, he never developed a case of “professional localism” in policy toward China. The United States

needed to limit its involvement in East Asia, and during the Korean War he worked hard to keep the conflict from spreading to other regions—to avert it from becoming the Cold War version of the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand.

Individuals looking for strategic guidance from the career of George C. Marshall, or on any of the topics addressed in this book, will find the time they invest in these pages a worthwhile endeavor.

NICHOLAS EVAN SARANTAKES



One Belt One Road: Chinese Power Meets the World, by Eyck Freymann. Harvard East Asian Monograph 439. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Asia Center, 2021. 330 pages. \$28 (paperback).

This is an ambitious book about China's geostrategic initiative known as One Belt, One Road (OBOR). The main benefit to be gained from reading Freymann's well-researched volume is the macro understanding gained about the massive, continent-spanning efforts under way by the People's Republic of China (PRC). By adopting a macro assessment built on microlevel case studies of select OBOR investments in ports located across the globe, the author succeeds in providing both a big-picture understanding and a detailed depiction of what OBOR represents to China and potentially to the world.

Because documenting China's OBOR is an overwhelming task, few have tried to capture the program in its entirety. In attempting to do so, Freymann's monograph provides a public service. Rather than just reviewing newspaper headlines and press releases, the author

actually visited several OBOR project sites to see their progress firsthand. The book includes photos the author took in some locations where projects long in the planning stage clearly have yet to break ground, while others have progressed. Interviews with local officials and other observers add clarity on why the projects have or have not proceeded as planned, providing a nuanced understanding of the countervailing, dynamic forces at play: local political leaders' desire, and often need, to attract foreign investment, paired with differing degrees of wariness in accepting a more economically and financially dependent relationship with Beijing. The most useful part of this volume is perhaps its opening chapters, which attempt to explain what OBOR is and is not. The main challenge in defining OBOR is what Freymann convincingly explains is Xi Jinping's deliberately ambiguous vision for the initiative, and how guidance emanating from Beijing is intended to be interpreted variably by officials, investors, and other audiences. Different interpretations are acceptable so long as they advance the narrative of China's beneficent rise.

OBOR's ambiguity is why Freymann concludes that Xi's initiative amounts to a convenient new "brand" for China's long-standing "Going Out" strategy. As the author points out, numerous overseas projects begun prior to Xi's announcement of OBOR in 2013 have been counted retroactively as OBOR projects, while others that have fallen out of favor, failed, or otherwise stalled have not. Another important insight Freymann details is the different messaging aimed at Chinese domestic audiences as compared with foreign, particularly Western, populations.

Freymann presents three case studies to illustrate his findings: the port of Hambantota in Sri Lanka, the port of

Bagamoyo in Tanzania, and the port of Piraeus in Greece. He notes that all three port-development projects originally were conceived by the home states, not by China; PRC investors came into the picture only after other, Western investors had passed up these investment opportunities, for a variety of reasons.

Yet Freymann's contention that OBOR is primarily a political and ideological pursuit more than an economic or financial one remains debatable, particularly given Beijing's long-standing strategic-development objectives, which require continuous market expansion, foreign direct investment, and access to foreign technology. In fact, Beijing appears to be leveraging its power overseas in much the same way it has done at home: first, leveraging the size of China's markets to attract foreign investment and technology transfer to the mainland; and second, leveraging the size of China's wallet to foster similar opportunities for PRC businesses overseas. Freymann's case studies also make clear why it would be naive to believe that other states—particularly those with developing economies—will pass up Chinese overseas investment offers or resist the PRC's market or technology-transfer pressures easily, especially if the West does not afford them competing opportunities.

A key lesson that strategists and policy makers ought to take away from this in-depth study of China's OBOR is to not judge the initiative by typically Western standards of economic gain or financial return on investment, since failures in these aspects are risks Beijing is willing to accept and—currently—can afford, in return for political and ideological patronage, along with industrial and technological opportunities. Rather, the West ought to view OBOR the way

Freyermann contends China does: as a modern means of tactically and strategically incentivizing tribute to China—a challenge to which “the Western world does not yet have an answer.” This explains why Freyermann concludes that “OBOR poses a profound threat to U.S. global leadership.” If it is not presenting an attractive alternative, Washington will need to accept the expanding geostrategic, ideological, economic, financial, and technological influence that Beijing

will wield, especially over neighboring states. This situation will remain true so long as China maintains the economic and financial wherewithal to continue to invest, particularly in places the West finds too risky, and as long as leaders in neighboring, developing, and other states view accepting China’s investment offers as constituting a more advantageous (or less risky) decision than rejecting them.

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